

Top 10 Questions Regarding the Proposed Septic System Regulations

Why did the State Water Board propose these regulations?

AB 885, a law passed in 2000, requires the State Water Board to develop statewide regulations for septic systems. AB 885 can be found in the Water Code, section 13290-13291.7.

Is this a “done deal”?

No. Because of feedback from citizens’ written comments and input from those who attended a series of workshops conducted by the State Water Board throughout the state, the current proposed regulations will be reconsidered, and will be revised and recirculated for public comment.

Is this another fee or tax to support Government?

No. None of the money goes to any level of government. The costs associated with complying are estimates of what private companies will charge homeowners to perform the proposed inspections. The numbers are estimates from professionals in the field. Actual prices are determined by our free market system.

What is an impaired water body?

An impaired water body is a water body that has been found to be polluted. It includes streams, lakes, rivers and other surface water bodies. There are only six impaired water bodies in California that currently fit within the very narrow definition established in the proposed regulations. They are: Malibu Creek; Northern Santa Monica Bay Beaches; the Santa Clara River, Ventura/Los Angeles; Canyon Lake, Riverside; Lake Elsinore, Riverside, and Rainbow Creek, San Diego. The local Regional Water Board could broaden the list, but only after a public process.

If my system is within 600 feet of an impaired water body do I need to retrofit my system?

This may not be the case. If the system is not contributing to pollution, then it does not need to be retrofitted. If the system is contributing to pollution, under the proposed regulations, a retrofit would be required at an estimated cost of \$45,000.

Why are you trying to impose a one-size-fits-all approach to so many different regions?

The technical requirements in the proposed regulations are based on engineering standards that are used nationwide. The standards are applied to each specific site and adjusted for soil type and other factors. Other region-specific approaches will be considered in reviewing comments and revising the regulations.

Why fix something that is not broken? I know when it's time to inspect my septic tank.

Preventive maintenance is less expensive in the long run than replacing the field if it fails. The purpose of septic tank monitoring is to be sure the leach field remains in good operating condition for as long as possible.

My well water is fine, so why should I monitor my well water every five years?

State Water Board staff has sampled over 1,000 domestic wells in five different counties. About 25 percent of those wells show water quality problems. We would welcome suggestions on other ways of providing assurance that septic tank systems are not impairing the quality of nearby drinking water wells.

We understand that this started in Malibu, so why is the state treating every region like Malibu?

The Water Boards have found chemicals associated with septic tanks in groundwater throughout the state and in surface water in several areas of the state. The Water Board will consider other region-specific approaches in reviewing comments and revising the regulations.

Am I going to lose my house because my existing septic system does not comply with the standards for new septic systems?

No. The proposed regulations do not apply new standards to existing systems. Existing systems are not required to be in compliance with the new standards.